

# Keeping Everyone Safe

## Parent Information



## Accident Prevention

This information sheet is based on guidance from the Child Accident Prevention Trust regarding Child Development: The 'why' as well as the 'what' <https://www.capt.org.uk/news/child-development-focus>

For parents it's easy to feel overwhelmed by the demands that come with family life and keeping children safe can feel very challenging.

### The "why" as well as the "what"

## To illustrate, here are four age-related scenarios:

### Baby

A baby lies on a changing mat for a nappy change. Their arms are outstretched, and their hand reaches the bag of nappy sacks. As a consequence of their grasp reflex (the same reflex which enables them to grip your finger) they get hold of a nappy sack and, with their hand to mouth reflex, pull it to their mouth, where the flimsy plastic clings.

Babies don't know they're in danger of suffocation. Furthermore, even though a baby might struggle for breath, they will not be able to move the nappy sack away from their mouth. Keep nappy sacks out of reach of young babies.

Obviously good advice and, if followed, then the risks are greatly reduced. However by knowing the 'why', we are more motivated to take action and better able to anticipate other suffocation risks.

### Toddler

Practising their newly-acquired climbing ability, a toddler climbs onto a chair. The chair is by a window with a roller blind and the blind cord is hanging near the chair. The child is unsteady, loses their footing and falls from the chair, tangling their head and neck in the looped blind cord.

Toddlers love to climb, but they won't understand that they are at risk of a fall when they climb onto furniture. If they wobble, they're unlikely to have learnt how to steady themselves. Furthermore, their windpipe is narrower and softer than that of an adult, so they can suffocate much more quickly – in as little as 20 seconds. Keep blind cords tied up and out of young children's reach.

With a more detailed understanding, parents will be better able to see how these aspects of their child's development links to other risks, such as falls down stairs or choking on food or small toys.

## Doing what comes naturally

Sometimes a quick safety tip – keep hot drinks out of reach – is sufficient. But by thinking about how a child is developing empowers us to anticipate risk across a whole range of scenarios. And importantly, it helps to understand that a child isn't being naughty, they just doing what comes naturally!

With just a little bit of a deeper understanding – understanding the 'why' as well as the 'what' – parents are much better placed to help protect their children from a serious accidental injury.

The links between child development and their susceptibility to accidents can be broadly categorised into two groups: physical and cognitive. In general, in the very early years, risk is related to both, and as they get to preschool and older, it becomes more linked to cognitive development.

### Preschooler

A three-year-old watches as their mother takes some paracetamol and puts the bottle in the bathroom cabinet out of reach. Later on at their grandmother's house, they come across a bottle of strong painkillers on her bedside table. Curious as to what's inside, they remove the child-resistant top and swallows a handful of the pills.

Young children learn by observing and copying those around them. Wanting to be like mummy or daddy is a completely normal part of their development. If they do something that they've seen someone do, but which might put them at risk, they are not intentionally being naughty. While a young child might initially understand the instruction not to touch, at this age, they can't be relied upon to understand the consequences or to remember the instruction.

Armed with this knowledge, parents and carers are better able to anticipate a variety of risks such as: lighters and matches, saucepan handles, and hair straighteners.

### Older child

A nine-year-old needs to cross a road on their way to school. They stop, looks both ways, and, apart from a car in the distance, judges it safe to cross. However the car is travelling fast and is actually quite close – at that speed, the driver hasn't got the stopping distance he needs when he sees the child in the road.

At this age, a child's brain is still developing the ability to judge distances and the speed at which a vehicle is travelling. And children develop differently. Knowing this will help parents and carers to make decisions about what a child who's becoming increasingly independent, can and can't do safely on their own.